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ABSTRACT

The predicted decline in usefulness and emphasis of projective techniques was analyzed from several different perspectives including the academic community, members of the American Psychological Association (APA) Division 12, internship centers, the applied clinical setting, and private practitioners. In addition, an extensive review of empirical, survey, and position studies over the past two decades was conducted. In order to gauge the current status of projective techniques, data were obtained in a national survey of 113 APA-approved clinical psychology programs. Analyses of results showed that 68 percent of the respondents required either one half or one full course on projective personality assessment. However, 46 percent felt that projective personality assessment would decrease in the academic setting in the near future. Respondents indicated that the clinical doctoral candidate should be familiar with the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), the Rorschach, and the Sentence Completion Test. On the surface, the findings seem to indicate a state of pessimism about the outlook for projective techniques, due to their poor psychometric properties. However, a majority of those surveyed felt projective techniques should be retained as an instructional area and that novice clinical practitioners should be familiar with the major traditional projective techniques of the past. The implications of previous research and the survey findings lend support to the usefulness of projective techniques. (JAC)

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The Status of Projective Techniques:
Or, "Wishing Won't Make It Go Away"

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Running head: Status of Projective Techniques

Abstract

The predicted decline of projective techniques in usefulness and emphasis was analyzed when viewed from several different perspectives: (a) the academic community, (b) members of APA Division 12, (c) internship centers, (d) the applied clinical setting, and (e) private practitioners. An extensive review of empirical, survey, and position studies over the past two decades supports the utility of projective techniques, with the exception of the clinical academic setting. The apparent loss in status of projective assessment is attributed, in part, to changing roles and functions of clinical psychologists. Implications for graduate training are discussed.

The Status of Projective Techniques: Or, "Wishing Won't Make It Go Away"

The precarious status of psychodiagnostics has been commented on in several position articles (Aronow & Reznikoff, 1973; Ivnik, 1977; Lewandowski & Saccuzzo, 1976; Korchin & Schuldberg, 1981; Mischel, 1977; Petzelt & Craddick, 1978). But the perennial criticism is usually directed toward projective techniques (Field, Bolton, & Dana, 1982; Jensen, 1964; Swenson, 1968). Moreover, the clinical literature is replete with studies that characterize projective techniques as possessing poor psychometric properties, inadequate predictive utility, and complex interpretative standards (Holmen & Docter, 1972; Cleveland, 1976; Munter, 1975), thus, subsequently, contributing to their decline in status among the clinical psychology community. Conversely, a number of authors committed to projective assessment (Klopfer & Taulbee, 1976; Rabin, 1981; Blatt, 1975; Sugarman, 1978) claim that although these criticisms have some merit, their validity reflects poor diagnostic practice rather than an inherent weakness in assessment per se, while providing rich idiographic data (Aronow, Reznikoff, & Rauchway, 1979); Other studies support the empircal utility of projective tests (Parker, 1983; Maloney & Glasser, 1982; Sims, Dana, & Bolton, 1983; Voigt & Dana, 1963). In essence, however, critics have expoused projective techniques to be empircally and practically moribund. (Bersoff, 1973; Breger, 1968; Goldfried & Kent, 1972).

Specifically, the issue concerning the status of projective assessment in the professional role of the clinical psychologist has been intensely debated over several decades. In light of the perceived inferior status attributed to psychodiagnostic testing, there is little doubt that projective assessment has lost its traditional foundation and prestige as part of the identity of the professional psychologist (Lubin & Lubin, 1972; Garfield &

Kurtz, 1976; Thelen, Varble, & Johnson, 1968; Shemberg & Keeley, 1970). This apparent deemphasis and decline in usefulness, however, loses some of its zest when viewed with keeness from several different perspectives: (a) the academic community, (b) members of APA Division 12, (c) internship centers, (d) the applied clinical setting, and (e) private practitioners.

The Academic Community

Thelen and colleagues (Thelen, et al., 1968; Thelen & Ewing, 1970) found that academic clinical faculty in APA-approved clinical training programs felt quite pessimistic toward projective techniques. Although these academicians considered coursework in projectives (i.e., as teaching or clinical tools) moderately important, 75% predicted a decline in the future value attributed to projectives. Moreover, 62% of the sample felt that projectives were unsupported by research findings (Thelen et al., 1968). In a recent study involving sub-doctoral level counseling programs, Piotrowski and Keller (1983) found similar attitudes toward projectives. Further, Shemberg and Keeley (1970), in surveying Ph.D. clinical programs, found an increase in training emphasis with objective personality measures with a concomitant decrease in the value attributed to projective techniques. This continued emphasis on objective assessment in clinical training programs has been recently supported in a study on MMPI teaching practices (Moreland & Dahlstorm, 1983).

APA Division 12 Membership

A shift out of the academic fog of pessimism into the practical reality of the applied setting, finds projectives alive and well. In a survey of members of APA Division 12 (clinical psychology), Wade and colleagues (Wade & Baker, 1977; Wade, Baker, Morton & Baker, 1978), found that projective tests were used with high frequency, particularly the Rorschach and TAT. Further, clinicians were queried about tests that they advised clinical psychology students to learn; the Rorschach, TAT, Bender-Gestalt, Human Figure Drawings, and Sentence Completion Tests were among the top eight measures mentioned; as stated by Wade and Baker (1977),

> clinicians are probably unaffected by negative testing research because (a) there are strong needs to assess (b) clinicians accord personal clinical experience greater weight than experimental evidence, and (c) there are few practical alternatives to tests (p. 874).

On the other hand, Garfield and Kurtz (1974) found that diagnostic and assessment practices constituted only 10% of the devoted professional time in their sample of Division 12 membership. Noteworthy, only about 30% of the sample indicated university activities has their primary institutional affiliation, whereas Norcross and Prochaska (1982) found "university affiliation" to have decreased to 22% in their study of Division 12. It is of interest that apparently Division 12 members have diverse professional and occupational identities predominantly outside the academic setting.

Internship Center Training

McCully (1965) and later Levitt (1973) found directors in APA-approved internship centers having strong support for academic preparation in projective techniques by prospective interns. Further, Garfield and Kurtz (1973), in surveying attitudes on diagnostic testing by internship center directors, found that university training instilled an overally critical attitude toward psychodiagnostics in students. Moreover, the Rorschach, TAT, and Bender-Gestalt were recommended among the major instruments suggested for university training. Reaffirming this viewpoint, Shemberg and colleagues (Shemberg & Keeley, 1974; Shemberg & Leventhal, 1981) found that directors of internship training were dissatisfied with university instruction on traditional approaches toward assessment, particularly, the deemphasis given to projective techniques. Specifically, Rorschach and TAT training were reported as "inadequate" by 65% of the respondents (Shemberg & Keeley, 1974). This finding was expected due to the apparent influence of behaviorally-oriented academic clinicians (Shemberg & Leventhal, 1978). Given

this continued negative attitude toward university based clinical training, Petzel and Berndt (1980) investigated the importance of academic and clinical preparation in internship selection criteria. The most commonly suggested courses were those in the psychodiagnostic testing area.

The Applied Clinical Setting

In national surveys on test usage and assessment practices in a variety of clinical agencies, the Rorschach, TAT, Bender-Gestalt, Human Figure Drawings, and Sentence Completion Tests were among the highest ranked instruments (Lubin, Wallace, & Paine, 1971; Sundberg, 1961). Piotrowski and Keller (1978) corroborated these earlier findings on test utility in a survey of outpatient mental health facilities. Moreover, in a recent survey of community mental health agencies and hospitals, Brown and McGuire (1976) found the Rorschach, TAT, HTP, Bender-Gestalt, CAT, and Sentence Completion Test to be the most popular instruments (rated among the top ten) used primarily for "personality assessment" purposes. Furthermore, Sell and Torres-Henry (1979) investigated the frequency of psychological test usage in university counseling centers in the United States. Regarding the question of whether psychological testing is on the decline, respondents indicated that their centers use a variety of tests, including projective techniques, and use them frequently.

In the most recent study, Lubin, Larsen, and Matarazzo (In press) replicated the earlier national survey by Lubin et al., (1971). The Rorschach, Sentence Completion Tests, TAT, HTP, and DAP were still rated among the "top ten" instruments for frequency of usage. As stated by Lubin et al., "The popularity of projective techniques persists despite a strong negative bias against them by the majority of university clinical faculty."

This apparent popularity of projective techniques in the applied setting was made rather salient in a study by Levy and Fox (1975) which surveyed employers who placed descriptions of clinical job opportunities in the APA Employment Bulletin. Their results indicated that 90% of the respondents expected their job applicants to

have testing skills, and 84% of those respondents reported that these skills ought to include projective techniques.

Practitioners in Private Practice

The support for the utility of projective techniques is equally evident in studies of professional practitioners in private practice. Hinkle, Nelson, and Miller (1968), in surveying members of Psychologists Interested in the Advancement of Psychotherapy (PIAP), found that the Rorschach was listed as the most frequently utilized instrument. Wiedemann and Mintz (1973) found that student therapists had favorable attitudes toward the utility of psychodiagnostics, but suggested that testing reports were used primarily as a confirmatory function.

A Current Survey

To gauge the current status of projective techniques, data were obtained in a national survey of APA-approved clinical psychology programs (Piotrowski & Keller; in press). While this study investigated a broad spectrum of psychodiagnostic testing issues, the following synopsis focuses on the actual utility of projective techniques and serves as yet another example of the popularity of projectives. A two-page questionnaire was forwarded to the Director of all (N = 113) fully APA-approved clinical psychology programs listed in the December 1981 American Psychologist. Several questions approximated those posed by Thelen et al., (1968).

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they required either one half or one full course on projective personality assessment. On the other hand, 46% felt that projective personality assessment would decrease in the academic setting in the near future. Thelen et al., (1968) found this same pattern; that is, 71% of their sample believed that the Rorschach and TAT should be required coursework, while 65% of their sample designated projective techniques as decreasing in future importance. In response to what five projectives tests the clinical doctoral candidate should be familiar; the TAT, Rorschach, and Sentence Completion Tests were mentioned by 85%, 83%, and 53% of the respondents, respectively, as one of the five measures mentioned. This seemed consistent with the findings of

Wade and Baker (1977) in that clinicians suggested that clinical graduates should be knowledgeable with the major projective techniques. In response to another question,only 5% of the respondents indicated that the Rorschach was the most frequently used personality measure used in Ph.D. dissertations; no other projective techniques were mentioned. This is supported by previous findings that regard projective techniques as poor research instruments (Ritzler & Del Gaudio, 1976), and as declining in research output (Reynolds & Sundberg, 1976). Of course, this might be due to the popularity of using empirically based, quantitative approaches (i.e., MMPI). Finally, 51% of the present sample had the opinion that based on research findings projective test usage in applied clinical settings was not warranted. Thelen et al., (1968) found that 62% of the sample considered projective techniques unsupported by research findings.

On the surface, the findings seemed to indicate a state of pessimism about the outlook for projective techniques, particularly with regard to poor psychometric properties. However, this pessimism has now been articulated for nearly three decades. Surely, at least the major projective techniques have withstood the negative onslaught and criticism. Moreover, a majority of the present sample felt projectives should be retained as an instructional area and that novice clinical practitioners should be familiar with the major traditional projective techniques of the past. This later point is strongly supported by clinicians in both academic and non-academic settings.

Discussion

Why this rather paradoxical stance toward projective techniques? Usually the demise of projective technique has been attributed to factors, such as, unsubstantiated research findings, public protest, inadequate graduate training, and high cost of diagnosis via testing (Cleveland, 1976). Also, contributing to the disenchantment with projective assessment are new and empirically based assessment measures and procedures (Goldfried, 1979; Goldfried & Kent, 1972; Goldfried & Sprafkin, 1974;

Ross, 1974), not to mention the current training emphasis in clinical neuropsychology (Golden & Kuperman, 1980; Isaac & McCaffrey, 1983). In addition, more prestigous professional functions have become available to clinical psychologists (e.g., therapy, consultation, and administration). Thus, one can but speculate why psychodiagnostic testing, for better or worse, has not completely fallen into disrepute. Perhaps, academic clinicians have a need to maintain an image of "psychodiagnostician" in clinical students. This is due to the fact that psychological testing has long been the province of the clinical psychologist. Further, an "investment" model interpretation has its merits; after 60 years of dedication to various assessment instruments, could we have been completely wrong? Surely, there must be some utility after all that training, research, and service. On the other hand, the apparent increasing emphasis on objective assessment seems to reflect the need for psychometric precision and empirical purity which have long been the basis for criticism of projectives. In this regard, it has been noted that test usage and popularity does not necessarily warrant psychometric credibility (Reynolds,1979; Reynolds & Sundberg, 1976). However, Wade and Baker (1977) suggested that clinicians accord personal clinical experience greater weight than experimental evidence in determining the efficacy of psychodiagnostic assessment.

Regardless, the implications of previous research and survey findings lend support for the usefulness of projective techniques. This utility is most apparent by the psychodiagnostic practices of clinicians in applied settings, and practitioners in private practice. APA internship training facilities also expouse an affirmative mandate for assessment skills such as; knowledge, administration, and interpretation of projective techniques. Apparently, the least enthusiasm for projectives resides with academic clinicians whose disenchantment is based on poor research and empirical findings. However, even for academicians, projectives have a function as teaching and clinical tools. Evidently, even the astute academician is cognizant of the

status that psychodiagnostic testing plays in the mental health marketplace (Levy & Fox, 1975; Smith & Soper, 1978).

What emphasis should be given to the teaching of projectives, considering this state of dissonance on the part of clinical instructors and students alike? Biederman and Cerbus (1971), in surveying clinical programs on emphasis given to Rorschach teaching, found fewer course offerings than in the past. More recently, however, it was found that 81% of APA-clinical programs place major emphasis on the Rorschach in the primary assessment course (Ritzler & Del Gaudio, 1976). Regardless, it appears that university training offers the foundation in "projective" fundamentals, while evidence indicates an aura of anomalous diversity and "personalization" toward projective test use by those pursuing individualized post-doctoral experience (Exner & Exner, 1972). Perhaps, the task of clinical educators is to develop a balance between critical evaluation of tests and an appreciation of their usefulness; in other words, integrating theory and practice (Russ, 1978). Interestingly, Walfish, Kaufman, and Kinder (1980), found that recent graduates of APA-approved clinical programs were highly satisfied with their training in projective testing. Indeed, clinical students may have to take the responsibility of supplementing their training in projective assessment if they expect such clinical activities in their future endeavors.

It is fitting, at this point that reference be made to the most recent Society of Personality Assessment 1983 Distinguished Contribution address (Weiner, in press). The paper entitled "The Future of Psychodiagnosis Revisited", was an update on Weiner's earlier work (Weiner, 1972) and stressed the continued, if not improved, status attributed toward psychodiagnosis in current clinical psychology. The popularity and clinical acceptance of projective techniques over the past 10 years was strongly emphasized.

So as we enter the third decade of controversy surrounding projective techniques, it is apparent that projective assessment techniques although dethroned from their previous high estate are still with us. To paraphrase Fox and Levy (1975), "projective testing is alive & weil." More specifically, for those who posit that projective techniques will be a blot on the history of psychology, "wishing won't make it go away."

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Footnotes

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